

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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The language used to describe sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) varies greatly across the world and is dependent on such factors as location, language, age and cultural references. However, there are some terms commonly used within the international context. These terms, as well as less common terms useful to our understanding of SOGIESC, are included here.

We recognize that many of these terms are of Western origin, and that, in particular, the terms lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer represent concepts of personal identity that are not universal. Many people use other terms, or no terms, and it is critical to respect the autonomy of individuals in defining their own identities. We encourage you to learn relevant terms in your own context and, when in doubt, ask colleagues or connect with a local organization supporting the rights of people with diverse SOGIESC.

## ACRONYMS AND UMBRELLA TERMS

### SOGIESC

An acronym for sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics.

### PEOPLE WITH DIVERSE SOGIESC

Umbrella term for all people whose sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and/or sex characteristics place them outside culturally mainstream categories.

### LGBTIQ+

An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer. The plus sign represents people with diverse SOGIESC who identify using other terms. In some contexts, LGB, LGBT or LGBTI are used to refer to particular populations. Additional characters may be added, such as A for asexual, agender or ally, 2S for Two-Spirit or P for pansexual. In many locations, the letter order varies, e.g., LGBTQI+ or GLBTQI+. SOGIESC-related acronyms are not static and continue to evolve over time. To ensure inclusivity and accuracy, they should be applied with careful consideration to the individuals or populations being referenced.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

### SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Each person's enduring capacity for profound romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction to, other people. Encompasses hetero-, homo-, bi-, pan- and asexuality, as well as a wide range of other expressions of sexual orientation. This term is preferred over sexual preference, sexual behavior, lifestyle and way of life when describing an individual's feelings for or attraction to other people.



## SEXUAL PREFERENCE

Indicates a greater liking for particular characteristics over others in relation to an individual's romantic, emotional and/or physical feelings for, or attraction, to other people. For instance, this can be for tall, short, dark-haired, brown-eyed or other traits of a partner.

## SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

What we do sexually, and with whom; not always an accurate indicator of sexual orientation.

## HOMOSEXUAL

A person whose romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction is to people of the same gender. Note that, in English, homosexual may be considered an outdated clinical term that should be avoided, and gay and lesbian may be preferred. The term remains acceptable in many non-English-speaking contexts.

## HETEROSEXUAL (ALSO “STRAIGHT”)

A person whose romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction is to people of a different gender.

## MONOSEXUAL

Exclusively heterosexual or homosexual.

## BI/BISEXUAL

A person who has the capacity for romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction to people of more than one gender. Bisexual+ and Bi+ are sometimes also used as umbrella terms for non-monosexual identities.

## PANSEXUAL

A person who has the capacity for romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction to people of any gender.

## ASEXUAL

A person who may experience romantic or emotional attraction, but generally does not experience sexual attraction. *Demisexual* and *greysexual/grey-asexual* describe people with varying degrees of sexual attraction. Asexual may be used as an umbrella term encompassing demisexual, greysexual and other terms.

## GAY

Men whose enduring romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction is to men; also, women who are attracted to other women.

## LESBIAN

A woman whose enduring romantic, emotional and/or physical attraction is to women.

## QUEER

Traditionally a negative term, queer has been reclaimed by some people and is considered inclusive of a wide range of diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions. It may be used as an umbrella term for people with diverse SOGIESC, or as an alternative to the phrase “people with diverse SOGIESC” or the acronym LGBT. Queer is used by many people who feel they do not conform to a given society's economic, social and political norms based on their sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression.

## SAME-GENDER LOVING (SGL)

A phrase used in some queer communities of color. It was coined by activist Cleo Manago to better reflect the culture and experiences of people of African descent.



## ALLY

A person who publicly advocates for LGBTIQ+ human rights. While allies are often classified as individuals who are not LGBTIQ+, LGBTIQ+ people can also be allies. For instance, a gay, cisgender, endosex man who advocates for intersex rights may be considered an intersex ally.

# GENDER

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## GENDER

The socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for individuals based on the sex they were assigned at birth.

## GENDER ROLE

A set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate or desirable for a person based on their actual sex or perceived sex or gender.

## MASCULINITY/FEMININITY

Possession of the qualities associated with men and women in a particular society at a particular time.

## THE GENDER BINARY


A traditionally Western concept classifying gender into two distinct, supposedly “opposite” forms, labeled men/boys and women/girls. While many cultures have historically recognized a variety of gender identities with corresponding roles in society, these identities may have been suppressed with the spread of Western colonization. As these traditions are rediscovered and Western understanding evolves, it is clear the gender binary fails to capture the nuances of lived gender experiences. The gender binary has also historically been used to oppress women and people with diverse gender identities, preventing them from exercising their human rights and participating as equals in society. Adherence to the gender binary in language (for example, by using male/female pronouns or only referencing men, boys, women and girls), data collection and services excludes other genders and limits our ability to provide appropriate and respectful assistance.

## GENDER EQUALITY

The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of all individuals regardless of gender. Equality does not mean that all individuals are the same, but that rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on one’s sex assigned at birth, physical sex characteristics, gender assigned by society, gender identity or gender expression. Gender equality also implies that the interests, needs and priorities of all individuals should be taken into consideration. Equality between people of all genders, including cisgender and transgender men and women, other transgender people, non-binary people, and people with other diverse gender identities, is seen both as a human rights issue and a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development. When gender inequality exists, it is typically cisgender and transgender women, other transgender people, non-binary people and people with other diverse gender identities who are excluded or disadvantaged in relation to decision-making and access to social and economic resources.

## GENDER EQUITY

The process of being fair to individuals of all genders, including cisgender and transgender men and women, other transgender people, non-binary people, and people with other gender identities. Achieving gender equity may involve the use of temporary special measures to compensate for the historical and



systemic bias and discrimination faced by cisgender and transgender women, other transgender people, non-binary people and people with other diverse gender identities. Equity is a means; equality is the result.

## GENDER MAINSTREAMING

A strategy for assessing the gendered implications of any planned action, including policies, programming or legislation, and for ensuring the concerns and experiences of people of all genders are an integral consideration in the design, formulation, implementation, analysis and monitoring of planned actions.

## GENDER DIVERSITY

The equitable representation of people of different genders, including cisgender and transgender men and women, other transgender people, non-binary people, and other people with diverse gender identities.

# GENDER IDENTITY

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## GENDER IDENTITY

Each person's deeply felt internal and individual experience of gender, which may or may not correspond with their sex assigned at birth or the gender attributed to them by society. It includes the personal sense of the body, which may or may not involve a desire for modification of appearance or function of the body by medical, surgical or other means.

## CIS/CISGENDER

A person whose gender identity and the sex they were assigned at birth align.

## TRANS/TRANSGENDER

Terms used by some people whose gender identity differs from what is typically associated with the sex they were assigned at birth. Trans, transgender and non-binary are “umbrella terms” representing a variety of words that describe an internal sense of gender that differs from the sex assigned at birth and the gender attributed to the individual by society, whether that individual identifies as a man, a woman, simply “trans” or “transgender,” with another gender or with no gender.

## TRANSSEXUAL

An older term largely used in the Americas that is preferred by some whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex.

## MTF/FTM

Some transgender women may refer to themselves as M to F or MTF (male-to-female) transgender. Some transgender men may refer to themselves as F to M or FTM (female-to-male) transgender. These terms may be considered controversial due to their focus on transgender people's sex assigned at birth and their inherent exclusion of non-binary and other diverse gender identities.

## THIRD GENDER/THIRD SEX

Concepts common to many cultures, these terms refer to individuals who do not identify as men or women or whose gender is not perceived to be male or female, and/or to individuals whose gender identity does not match their assigned sex. They are commonly used in South Asia. See also the glossary category “Legal Recognition of Gender Identity.”



## NON-BINARY

An adjective describing people whose gender identity falls outside the male-female binary. Non-binary is an umbrella term that encompasses a wide variety of gender experiences, including people with a specific gender identity other than man or woman, people who identify as two or more genders (bigender or pan/polygender) and people who don't identify with any gender (agender).

## GENDERQUEER

A person who identifies as neither or both male or female, or a combination of genders.

## GENDERFLUID

An adjective describing someone whose gender is not fixed over time.

## AGENDER

A term describing people who do not identify with any gender. This term may also encompass people who experience a lack of gender and people whose gender is neutral. Agender people have a range of sexual orientations, gender expressions and sex characteristics.

## GENDER DYSPHORIA

A diagnosis contained in the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V) referring to a feeling of disconnect between one's sex characteristics and gender identity. This term replaced "gender identity disorder" but is controversial as it classifies diverse gender identity as a medical condition. Many transgender people, organizations and the UN have called for the reform of medical classifications to depathologize diverse gender identities. The World Health Organization (WHO) no longer considers diverse gender identity a mental illness and uses *gender incongruence* in its [International Classification of Diseases \(ICD11\)](#), effective January 2022, defined as characterized by a marked and persistent incongruence between an individual's experienced gender and assigned sex. See full text [here](#).

## PERSONAL PRONOUNS

Pronouns are words we use to talk about ourselves ("I"), to someone ("you") or about other people ("she," "he," "they," etc.) In English, "he" and "she," called third-person pronouns, are *gendered*, while singular "they" is gender-neutral. In other languages, such as Arabic and Korana, second-person pronouns ("you") and first-person pronouns ("I") may also be gendered. Some languages don't require pronouns to indicate gender or have a gender-neutral option, including Japanese, Swahili, Swedish and Turkish. Sweden has added the gender-neutral pronoun "hen" to their language to complement "han" (he) and "hon" (she). Other languages don't mark gender at all, including Armenian, Finnish, Hungarian, Persian and Yoruba.

## USE OF "X"


Indicates gender neutrality (e.g., Latinx rather than Latina or Latino; Mx. rather than Ms. or Mr.) or inclusion of intersex, transgender and individuals with other diverse genders (e.g., womxn rather than women).

# GENDER EXPRESSION

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## GENDER EXPRESSION

Individuals use a range of cues, such as names, pronouns, behaviour, clothing, voice, mannerisms and/or bodily characteristics, to interpret other individuals' genders. Gender expression is not necessarily an accurate reflection of gender identity. People with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex



characteristics do not necessarily have a diverse gender expression. Likewise, people who do not have a diverse sexual orientation, gender identity or sex characteristics may have a diverse gender expression.

## GENDER NON-CONFORMING

Behavior or appearance that is not in alignment with prevailing cultural expectations related to a particular gender. The term can apply to all individuals, regardless of SOGIESC.

## TRANSITION

The process of changing one's external gender presentation to be more in line with one's gender identity. Transition typically occurs over a long period of time and may include telling one's family, friends and co-workers, using a different name, pronoun and/or title, dressing differently, changing one's name and/or sex on legal documents, and undergoing hormone therapy and/or other treatment. In some countries, surgery is a requirement for legal gender recognition, which is a violation of UN human rights norms.

## GENDER CONFIRMATION/AFFIRMING TREATMENT

Gender confirmation, or gender affirming, treatment refers to medical interventions that may be part of transition. Not all people choose or can afford medical interventions such as hormone therapy or surgery. The terms "pre-operative" (or pre-op) or "post-operative" (or post-op) should be avoided because they can imply that transgender people who don't undergo medical transition are less valid. The terms "sex reassignment surgery" and "sex change operation" are outdated and should be avoided.

## PASSING

Perceived as cisgender or heterosexual (also called straight-passing) by others. People who "pass" are less exposed to violence and discrimination but typically must keep their diverse gender identity or sexual orientation concealed to maintain a level of safety. "Passing" is not a goal for all people with diverse SOGI and is not attainable for many due to circumstantial, familial, medical, physiological, and financial barriers.

## DRAG

Exaggerated, theatrical and/or performative gender presentation. Drag performers may use makeup, props, clothing and mannerisms to present a caricature of gender. Typically, drag performers portray a gender different from their own (e.g., a non-binary person dressing up in masculine "drag" and performing as a "drag king," or a man dressing up in feminine "drag" and performing as a "drag queen"). Drag performance may incorporate elements from high art, fashion, pageantry, comedy and more. While drag culture is closely associated with LGBTIQ+ communities, drag performers do not necessarily have diverse SOGIESC.

# SEX CHARACTERISTICS

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## SEX CHARACTERISTICS

Each person's physical features relating to sex, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, genitals and secondary physical features emerging from puberty.

## SEX

The classification of a person as having female, male and/or intersex sex characteristics. While infants are usually assigned the sex of male or female at birth based on the appearance of their external anatomy alone, a person's sex is a combination of a range of bodily sex characteristics.



## ASSIGNED SEX AT BIRTH

The sex that is assigned to a person at birth, typically based on the infant's external anatomy; also referred to as birth sex or natal sex. The phrases "assigned female at birth" (AFAB) and "assigned male at birth" (AMAB) refer to people with typical male or female sex characteristics, regardless of their gender identity or gender expression. The phrase "coercively assigned female [male] at birth" (CAFAB and CAMAB) refer to intersex people assigned a binary sex, often via non-consensual surgeries.

## INTERSEX

Intersex people are born with sex characteristics that don't fit typical definitions of male and female bodies. Intersex is an umbrella term used to describe a wide range of natural bodily variations. Some of these variations may be apparent before or at birth, while others are not apparent until after puberty or later, or may not be physically apparent at all. There are more than 40 intersex variations; experts estimate between .5% and 1.7% of the population is born with intersex traits.

Intersex people use many different terms, and sometimes use different terms with different people to avoid stigma, misconceptions, discrimination and violence. Common language includes "being" intersex, "having" an intersex variation, difference or trait, clinical diagnostic terms, "differences of sex development," and innate "variations of sex characteristics." The outdated and stigmatizing term "hermaphrodite" is generally rejected by intersex people today, however some have chosen to reclaim it. Intersex people may have any sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Because their bodies are seen as different, intersex people are at risk of human rights violations including violence, stigmatization and harmful practices. Intersex children may be subjected to surgeries and medical procedures in an attempt to align their appearance with societal expectations about male and female bodies. Surgery and other treatments carried out on children by definition cannot be premised upon informed consent, and there is rarely a medical need for such interventions. Surgery is typically irreversible and can cause a wide range of severe, negative physical and psychological health effects and result in sterilization. Some intersex people feel the procedures forced them into sex and gender categories that did not fit them.

Parents of intersex children often face pressure to agree to surgeries or treatments without being informed of alternatives or potential negative consequences. The rationale is frequently based on social prejudice, stigma associated with intersex bodies and administrative requirements to assign sex at birth registration. The UN considers surgery and medically unnecessary treatments on intersex individuals to be fundamental rights violations. In addition to intersex advocacy organizations, a number of bodies have called for an end to unnecessary surgery and treatment, including the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the Committee Against Torture and the special procedures mandate holders on the right to health and on torture.

## ENDOSEX

A term describing a person who was born with sex characteristics that fit typical binary notions of male or female bodies. An endosex person may identify with any gender identity or sexual orientation.

# PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## COMING IN/LETTING IN

The process of inviting someone into your personal space and sharing your diverse SOGIESC with them; may more accurately represent the experiences of those in circumstances where it is unsafe to "come out."





## COMING OUT/COME OUT

Originating from American gay communities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, these terms describe a process of self-acceptance wherein individuals acknowledge their identity, then share it with others. The terms also refer to an individual having to share their diverse SOGIESC with others, regardless of whether the disclosure is desired; this is sometimes called forced outing. For example, this may occur when an individual must share details about a same-gender spouse or show an ID that is not reflective of their gender expression. The concept and experience of coming out is not specific to every culture, including in the West.

## CONCEALMENT

Describes the act of keeping private one's SOGIESC, either as a personal preference or to avoid harm. When concealment is done to avoid stigma, discrimination and abuse, it can have a wide range of physical and psychological health consequences. Concealment to avoid harm may be referred to as "forced to conceal."

## OUTED/PUBLIC OUTING

A person's SOGIESC being made public without their consent or knowledge, often for malicious purposes.

## QUESTIONING

A term that describes people who are exploring their SOGIESC.

# LEGAL ISSUES AND RECOGNITION

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## LEGAL RECOGNITION OF GENDER IDENTITY

Multiple countries recognize the right of transgender people to correct their gender on official documents, such as national identity cards or passports. Some countries additionally recognize a third gender or third sex classification represented as O, T or X on official documents, including Australia, Bangladesh, Germany, Nepal, Iceland, India, Pakistan and New Zealand. Many of these national laws have been critiqued for being inaccessible to transgender people and people with other diverse gender identities.

## SODOMY LAWS

A type of law prohibiting anal sex between consenting adults, including in non-commercial and private contexts, and/or same-sex sexual acts. While sodomy laws may prohibit anal sex between cisgender men and women, they are typically disproportionately applied against people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. They may also be referred to as laws pertaining to crimes against nature or buggery laws.

## LAWS OF GENERAL APPLICATION

Laws that are not specifically targeted towards people with diverse SOGIESC, but which are disproportionately used against them as a way to police the expression of identities. These may include "sodomy," "public debauchery," "public morality," "public order" or "impersonation" laws.

## CIVIL UNION

Formal recognition of committed relationships involving individuals not legally considered to be of the same sex. In some countries, civil unions confer many, but not all, of the same rights, benefits and privileges as different-sex marriages, including in relation to taxes, social security benefits, estate planning and medical decisions. Note that while most jurisdictions still use the terms "same-sex," "opposite-sex" and "different-sex," the UN defines sexual orientation in relation to gender attraction.





## HATE CRIMES

Acts that constitute an offense under criminal law and are motivated by bias or prejudice towards particular groups of people. Hate crimes can include threats, property damage, assault and murder.

## PREJUDICE

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### PERCEPTION

In this context, refers to the act of viewing others in relation to their SOGIESC. This is often based on stereotypes and may be done in an unconscious manner.

### HOMO-, BI-, TRANS- AND INTERSEXMISIA

Hatred or dislike of gay or lesbian people, bisexual people, transgender people or intersex people, respectively, that may manifest in exclusionary behavior, stigma, harassment, discrimination and/or violence. While not in common use, they have recently been endorsed by UN-GLOBE, the group representing LGBTIQ+ staff in the UN system, as more accurate than homo-, bi-, trans- and intersexphobia.

### HOMO-, BI-, TRANS- AND INTERSEXPHOBIA

Fear of gay or lesbian people, bisexual people, transgender people or intersex people, respectively, which may manifest in exclusionary behavior, stigma, harassment, discrimination and/or violence. Considered outdated and inaccurate by some who prefer terms ending in “-misia.”

### HETEROSEXISM/HETERONORMATIVITY

Viewing heterosexuality as superior; assuming all people are heterosexual.

### CISSEXISM/CISNORMATIVITY

Viewing cisgender people as superior; assuming all people are cisgender.

### HOMONORMATIVITY

The assumption that the norms and values of heterosexuality should be replicated and performed amongst homosexual people. Homonormativity selectively privileges cisgendered homosexuality that is coupled and monogamous as worthy of social acceptance.

### MONOSEXISM

Promoting monosexuality as superior or more legitimate than bisexuality, pansexuality or other non-monosexual orientations; assuming all people are monosexual.

### SEXUAL RACISM

A specific form of racial prejudice enacted in the context of sex or romance. This may manifest as someone not being sexually or romantically attracted to someone because of their race and/or ethnicity.

### GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE (GBV)

Any act of violence targeting an individual on the basis of their gender. It includes acts that inflict physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, the threats of such acts, coercion and arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life. GBV encompasses violence against people based on their SOGIESC because diverse SOGIESC is often perceived as a transgression of gender norms.

## CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE (CRSV)

Incidents or patterns of sexual violence in conflict settings, post-conflict situations or times of political strife that include rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization or any other form of sexual violence. CRSV against people with diverse SOGIESC has been recognized by the UN as a form of GBV that is often motivated by homo-, bi-, trans- and intersexmisic/phobic attitudes.

## RESEARCH AND PUBLIC HEALTH

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### MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN (MSM)

A term used to refer broadly to people assigned the sex of male who engage in sexual activity with others assigned the sex of male, regardless of how they personally identify. This category includes cisgender men who have sex with transgender women or with nonbinary people assigned the sex of male, and vice versa. It does not include transgender men who have sex with cisgender men or transgender women.

### WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH WOMEN (WSW)

A term used to refer broadly to people assigned the sex of female who engage in sexual activity with others who have been assigned the sex of female, regardless of how they personally identify. For example, this may include cisgender women who have sex with transgender men or nonbinary people who have been assigned the sex of female. It does not include transgender women who have sex with cisgender women or with transgender men.

## DIVERSE SOGIESC TERMS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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The following are just a few examples of the thousands of terms used to describe diverse SOGIESC around the world. You are encouraged to identify terms relevant to your language(s) and specific context. To suggest a term be added to or amended in this section, please contact [LGBTIFocalPoint@iom.int](mailto:LGBTIFocalPoint@iom.int).

### ACAULTS

A slang term in Burmese referring to individuals assigned the sex of male at birth who assume the dress and social roles of women.

### AKAVA'INE

A Māori term from the Cook Islands used to describe transgender or transsexual women.

### BAKLA

A Filipino Tagalog term encompassing an array of sexual and gender identities, but particularly referring to a person assigned the sex of male at birth who assumes the dress, mannerisms and social roles of a woman.

### BURRNESHA

Specific to northern Albania, this term describes individuals assigned the sex of female at birth who take on or are assigned a male gender identity and take a sworn vow of celibacy. The practice is also referred to as *vajzë e betuar*, when parents assign a child's gender at birth or in early childhood.



## CALABAI/CALALAI/BISSU

The Bugi people of southern Sulawesi, Indonesia recognize three sexes (male, female, intersex) and five genders (men, women, *calabai*, *calalai* and *bissu*). *Calabai* are assigned male at birth and embody a feminine gender identity. *Calalai* are assigned female at birth and embody a male gender identity. *Bissu* are considered a “transcendent gender,” either encompassing all genders or none. *Bissu* serve ritual roles in Bugi culture and are sometimes equated with priests.

## DEE/TOM

Used in Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines, these terms describe women with feminine gender expression (*dees*) and masculine gender expression (*toms*) who are attracted to other women.

## FA’AFAFINE

A third-gender people of Samoa and the Samoan diaspora similar in meaning to *fakaleitī* and *māhū*.

## FAKALEITĪ

A Tongan individual assigned male at birth who has a feminine gender expression. This term is similar in meaning to the terms *fa’afafine* and *māhū*.

## GUEVEDOCHE

A term used in the Dominican Republic to refer to some individuals who are intersex and do not identify as men or women.

## HAMJENSGARA

A term used in Iran by men whose primary attraction is to other men. This term is used instead of “gay” by Iranian men who do not want to be perceived as western LGBTIQ+ activists. The term emphasizes a way to belong to traditional Iranian family structures.

## HIJRA

A broad term used in South Asia, and particularly in India, which sometimes refers to individuals who do not identify as men or women and in other contexts to refer to women who were assigned the sex of male at birth. Also referred to as *khawaja sara* and *zenana* in Pakistan and northern India.

## KHANITH

A term from Oman denoting a person assigned the sex of male at birth who has a feminine gender expression. Traditionally a derogatory and/or inaccurate term, it has been reclaimed by some individuals.

## KUCHU

A slang term for “gay” in Uganda that was traditionally negative but has been reclaimed by some people.

## MĀHŪ

A term meaning “in the middle.” In Kanaka Maoli (Hawaiian), Māori (New Zealand), Ma’ohi (Tahitian) and other French Polynesian cultures, it describes third gender people with traditional spiritual and social roles within the culture, similar to Tongan *fakaleiti* and Samoan *fa’afafine*.

## MASHOGA

A Kenyan Swahili term connoting a range of gender identities. While often used for gay men, many people described as *mashoga* are assigned male at birth and have a feminine or non-binary gender expression.



## METIS

In Nepal, a person assigned the sex of male at birth who has a feminine gender identity and/or expression.

## MITHLI

The shortened form of *mithli al-jins*; the English transliteration of an Arabic term used to describe a person whose primary attraction is to someone of the same gender. It is considered a non-derogatory term.

## MOTSOALLE

A Basotho term from Lesotho describing a woman in a socially acceptable long-term relationship with a woman, which may include physical intimacy and occur alongside each person's heterosexual partnership.

## MUXE

Among the Zapotec of the Oaxacan peninsula in Mexico, the term *muxe* has traditionally described individuals assigned the sex of male at birth who have a feminine gender expression. In recent decades, the term has also been used to apply to gay men.

## SHUGA/BUJAINA

Preferred terms in Tanzania for gay men (*shuga*) and lesbians (*bujaina*).

## SISTERGIRL/BROTHERBOY

Terms used to describe indigenous transgender people in Australia among the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A *sistergirl* (or *sistagirl*) is an individual assigned male at birth who identifies as female and a *brotherboy* is an individual assigned female at birth who identifies as male. *Sistergirls* will often adopt a female gender role in their community and brotherboys a male gender role.

## SKESANA

An IsiNggqumo term used by Bantu speakers in southern Africa and Zimbabwe to describe people who were assigned the sex of male at birth and have a female gender identity or feminine gender expression. In the same language, *injonga* refers to masculine gay men.

## TAKATĀPUI (OR TAKATAAPUI)

A Māori term traditionally referring to a same-gender partner; more recently, an umbrella term describing diverse sexual orientation and gender identity in a way that encompasses indigenous identity. Other Māori and Pacific terms used in New Zealand to describe gender identity include *aikāne*, *akava'ine*, *fa'afafine*, *faafatama*, *fakafifine*, *fakaleiti*, *māhū*, *palopa*, *tangata ira tāne*, *vakasalewalewa* and *whakawahine*.

## TIDA WENA


A two-spirit identity among the Warao people, an indigenous Venezuelan culture. The term describes individuals who identify as neither male nor female. They are thought to possess two spirits and often assume the role of shaman.

## TRAVESTI

A term used in South America, and particularly in Argentina, Brazil and Peru, to describe people who were assigned the sex of male at birth and have a female gender identity.

## TWO-SPIRIT

A term that groups gender identities specific to indigenous cultures in North America and encompasses unique terms that vary between nations. According to the Two-Spirit Society of Denver, "Two-spirit refers



to another gender role believed to be common among most, if not all, first peoples of Turtle Island [North America], one that had a proper and accepted place within native societies. This acceptance was rooted in the spiritual teachings that say all life is sacred.” For example, *winkte* is a Lakota term meaning “to be as a woman” and *nadleehi* is a Dine [Navajo] term meaning “those who transform” and referring to one of four gender identities: masculine feminine, masculine masculine, feminine masculine or feminine feminine.

### X-JENDA

A Japanese term describing individuals whose gender identity falls outside the binary. The term is inclusive of both endosex and intersex individuals and is often abbreviated FTX, MTX and XTX.

## TERMS TO AVOID IN ENGLISH

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The following are examples of terms that should be avoided when talking to or about people with diverse SOGIESC, unless the individual with diverse SOGIESC you are speaking with uses the term and specifies that you may use it to refer to them. This list is by no means exhaustive. It focuses on English; terms to use and avoid will differ widely depending on the language, and what is inappropriate in one language may be appropriate in another. To learn more about appropriate terminology in your location, ask colleagues with diverse SOGIESC and local organizations supporting the rights of people with diverse SOGIESC what terms should be used and avoided in your language(s), society and cultural context.

- **Homosexual:** In English, the term homosexual is perceived as clinical in nature. Gay and lesbian are typically preferred where individuals identify using those terms.
- **Sexual preference or sexual behavior:** These terms imply that sexual orientation is a choice.
- **Lifestyle, way of life, agenda:** These terms imply diverse SOGIESC is a choice or social behavior that can be modified, which should be avoided. In this context, agenda implies having a diverse SOGIESC is politically motivated or people with diverse SOGIESC seek to influence others’ sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Community:** There is no one “LGBTIQ+ community.” The term people is preferred; populations may be used in specific instances when referring to particular groups of individuals.
- **Abnormal or condition:** These terms imply that diverse SOGIESC is a sickness or disease.
- **Faggot, fag, homo, dyke, kathoey/ladyboy (Thailand):** Terms typically used as defamatory slurs against people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and/or gender expressions.
- **Any terms** that associate people with diverse SOGIESC with pedophilia or another form of abuse.
- **Special rights:** The rights of people with diverse SOGIESC are addressed under existing international law. The UN does not seek to provide people with diverse SOGIESC with new or special rights.



## REFERENCES

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*The definitions in this glossary were drawn from or informed by, among others:*

The International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) Yogyakarta Principles plus 10 [www.yogyakartaprinciples.org](http://www.yogyakartaprinciples.org), the GLAAD Media Reference Guide – 9<sup>th</sup> Edition <http://www.glaad.org/reference>, UN Free & Equal Campaign Fact Sheets <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Discrimination/Pages/LGBTFactSheets.aspx>, interACT Advocates for Intersex Youth <https://interactadvocates.org>, and the Digital Transgender Archive Global Terms <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/learn/terms>.